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NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: CONFRONTING
IDEOLOGY AND ARMED GROUPS**

by

Justin Overbaugh

December 2010

Thesis Advisor:
Second Reader:

Leo Blanken
Doug A. Borer

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| REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE | | | <i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i> | |
| Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503. | | | | |
| 1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank) | | 2. REPORT DATE December 2010 | 3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's Thesis | |
| 4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The Elephant in the Room: Confronting Ideology and Armed Groups | | | 5. FUNDING NUMBERS | |
| 6. AUTHOR(S) Justin Overbaugh | | | | |
| 7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000 | | | 8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER | |
| 9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A | | | 10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER | |
| 11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government. | | | | |
| 12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited. | | | 12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE | |
| 13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words) Current U.S. policy in the GWOT is predicated on an implicit assumption—that all societies share a universal preference ordering based on materialist concerns. This thesis examines and contrasts this “rational-materialist” approach to its main rival of “cultural determinism” and finds both to be lacking. By exploring two empirical cases—the U.S. Patriot movement, and Al Qaeda—I develop an alternative approach that highlights the previously neglected impact of ideology on such movements. The results of this inductive analysis are then used to generate specific policy implications for the U.S. | | | | |
| 14. SUBJECT TERMS Ideology, Al Qaeda, Islamists, Patriot Movement, Counterterrorism, Counterinsurgency, Rational-Materialism, Cultural Determinism | | | 15. NUMBER OF PAGES 79 | |
| | | | 16. PRICE CODE | |
| 17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified | 18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified | 19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified | 20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU | |

NSN 7540-01-280-5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39-18

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**THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: CONFRONTING
IDEOLOGY AND ARMED GROUPS**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN DEFENSE ANALYSIS

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
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ABSTRACT

Current U.S. policy in the GWOT is predicated on an implicit assumption—that all societies share a universal preference ordering based on materialist concerns. This thesis examines and contrasts this “rational-materialist” approach to its main rival of “cultural determinism” and finds both to be lacking. By exploring two empirical cases—the U.S. Patriot movement, and Al Qaeda—I develop an alternative approach that highlights the previously neglected impact of ideology on such movements. The results of this inductive analysis are then used to generate specific policy implications for the U.S.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------|--|
| BATF | Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms |
| CJCS | Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff |
| CNAS | Center for a New American Security |
| FBI | Federal Bureau of Investigation |
| GWOT | Global War on Terror |

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express sincere thanks to my thesis advisor, Professor Leo Blanken for his invaluable mentorship, inspiration and support during the duration of my studies at the Naval Postgraduate School. Without his help, this thesis would not have been possible.

I also thank Professor Douglas A. Borer for providing advice and guidance for this thesis. Additionally, I would like to express my appreciation to Professor Heather S. Gregg for informing and encouraging my exploration of ideology.

Lastly, I am indebted to my fellow student, Major Eric Sauer, for spending countless hours discussing and clarifying the intricacies of the Patriot movement.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The agents pulled back the tarp to reveal the three armored personnel carriers with “FBI” painted in big white letters just enough to give the Montana Freeman a good look at them.¹ It had been over a year since arrest warrants were issued for the group that barricaded themselves on the Clark ranch in eastern Montana in 1995. It was now the early summer of 1996. The Freeman, a subset of the Patriot movement, did not recognize the authority of the U.S. federal government and seemed willing to sacrifice their lives to prove that point. Tensions were high and negotiations had broken down several times over the course of the standoff that had started in the town of Roundup and ended up 120 miles away in Jordan. Before it was over the U.S. federal government had allowed the Freeman to move uninhibited from one compound to another, flown Freeman members participating in the standoff to consult with members already in jail, and invited former fugitives of previous FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) standoffs to enter the Freeman compound to negotiate. These efforts only hinted at the significant change in strategy the FBI implemented against the Patriot movement in the mid 1990s. After the profound failures of the federal government at places like Ruby Ridge and Waco and the devastation of the recent bombing of the Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City, the U.S. federal government knew it had to make a significant change in its approach to this domestic unrest—what might even be argued to be a burgeoning insurgency. The arrival of the armored personnel carriers might have suggested to some that the lessons had not been learned, but they were wrong. Two weeks later the standoff with the Freeman was over without bloodshed, a marked departure from previous events.

What caused this change in government behavior? I would argue that the key factor was that the FBI recognized that the enemy they faced were not mere

¹ David A. Neiwert, *In God's Country: The Patriot Movement and the Pacific Northwest* (Pullman: The University of Washington Press, 1999), 254.

delinquents, but devotees to an ideological cause. In other words, the standard self-interested calculus of common criminals was absent. In its place was a collective worldview and group dynamic that drove the members of the Freeman to form beliefs, take actions, and bear burdens in a manner completely at odds with “normal” lawbreakers. This led government agencies to conclude that these actors would respond much differently to the application of force than the standard criminal. Ultimately, the FBI was successful against the Patriot movement for two reasons. First, the FBI recognized the role that ideology played in the behavior of these groups. Second, the FBI used that knowledge to inform how they would apply force against these groups.

How would such a reconsideration of the role of ideology affect contemporary foreign policy in regards to the “global war on terror”? Currently, such a recognition is absent from the U.S. government, as another significant non-state threat presents itself in the form of violent Islamist groups, Al Qaeda being chief among them. Both the Bush and Obama administrations have rejected the idea that Islamic teaching encourages violence directed against Western society. The recent *National Security Strategy of 2010* explicitly contends that any religion, including Islam, is inherently peaceful and cannot be considered a motivating factor for political violence.² This is not surprising. Refusing to condemn an entire religion and the people who subscribe to that religion, seems to be a wise political move for at least two reasons. First, labeling *all* Muslims as the enemy potentially creates at least some enemies where there was none before. Second, and perhaps more important, doing so might appear to be in direct contradiction to our core values of religious freedom and tolerance.

However, this politically amenable rhetoric can lead to ineffective or dangerous policy. The solution for the problem of terrorism, according to both administrations, does not lie in dealing with the cultural factors that motivate people to violence, but rather with the lack of economic and democratic

² Barak Obama, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 2010), 22.

opportunity for the Muslim population writ large. This argument is based—explicitly or implicitly—in rational-materialist theory, which claims that all actors work to maximize their economic utility and which treats all people as essentially uniform in preferences.³ The question remains, however, if such an approach is fully adequate to explain the causes of political violence. If it is not, as will be argued, then pursuing a policy grounded only in rational-materialism is dangerously flawed.

Addressing the cultural motivations for violence, however, may prove no less problematic than rational-materialist explanations. A “clash of civilizations” view of the world may prove to be adequate for describing a phenomenon, but may not lead to a useful general theory about the underlying causes of terrorism. To defeat terrorism encouraged by violent Islamism, the U.S. must first properly understand the threat. If rational-materialism and cultural determinism alone are inadequate to provide solutions, what can be done? By evaluating the U.S.’s treatment of a similar group, the Patriot movement, we can understand how the U.S. achieved success only after it accounted for the ideological motivations behind the movement, and then applied force appropriately. Applying force *appropriately* is key, as often it is the only method available that actually changes the minds of ideologues who tend to accept only facts that support for their worldview. Once an ideology is selected, there is no “going back” by applying rational-materialist based approaches.

In this thesis, I will attempt to show that general theories about political violence are inadequate to form successful counterterrorism policy and that understanding ideological motivations is key to defeating violent Islamism. I will do this in five steps. First, I will outline the two prevalent explanations regarding the underlying causes of terrorism and show why each by itself is inadequate to fully explain causation. Second, I will demonstrate the similarities between the Patriot movement and violent Islamists and hold them as adequately similar to

³ Geoffrey M. Hodgson, “On the Limits of Rational Choice Theory,” *Business School Working Papers UHBS, Economics Paper 27* (2003–6), <http://hdl.handle.net/2299/691>, 2.

allow for generalizing among them. Third, I will present an examination of the U.S. government response to both groups, showing that the U.S. succeeded against the Patriot movement, yet fails with violent Islamists, due to a fundamental understanding of (or failure to understand) the role that ideology plays in motivating political violence. Fourth, I will explore how ideology motivates actors to political violence and explain why often only the appropriate application of force is the key to defeating ideologically driven movements. Lastly, I will include policy recommendations for the way ahead.

II. EXPLANATIONS FOR TERRORISM

On September 11, 2001, Al Qaeda conducted a spectacular coordinated attack against the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Stunned by the attack, the U.S. launched the Global War on Terror (GWOT) by invading the operational headquarters of Al Qaeda in the Taliban controlled country of Afghanistan. Under the guise of the GWOT, the U.S. then followed up with a large-scale conventional invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq. Additionally, the U.S. launched smaller scale military operations as part of the GWOT in the Philippines, Horn of Africa, Yemen, and other locations in Muslim dominated countries. After nearly nine years of fighting, the threat from terrorism appears to loom as large as it did immediately after 9/11. Although attacks of the magnitude of 9/11 have not been replicated, and many smaller attacks have proven unsuccessful, the frequency of attempted terror attacks against the U.S. has only increased.⁴ While the number of foiled terror operations seems to indicate that the American security apparatus has improved its ability to defend against such attacks, the increased frequency of these attacks raises questions as to the effectiveness of the U.S.'s strategy in dealing with the root causes of terrorism; those conditions that spawn political violence. Without an effective strategy that deals with the root causes of terrorism, it remains a matter of time before a major successful attack is carried out again.

This chapter deals with the two predominate theories that attempt to explain the underlying causes of terrorism, not the techniques involved in defending against terror attacks. In describing these two approaches, I will use the terms *rational-materialism* and *cultural determinism*.⁵ In the first section of the

⁴ Carol Cratty, "Document Says Number of Attempted Attacks on U.S. Is at All-Time High," *CNN.com*, May 27, 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/05/26/terrorism.document/index.html>.

⁵ Michael Mousseau, "Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror," *International Security* 27, no. 3 (Winter 2002/2003): 6.

chapter, I will lay out both approaches. Next, I will examine how each proposition influences U.S. policy. Finally, I will assess the validity of current U.S. anti-terror strategy in light these findings.

To begin, it is important to understand what is meant by “terrorism.” Definitions for terrorism vary but the common use of the term recognizes it having “four characteristics: a fundamentally political nature, the symbolic use of violence, purposeful targeting of noncombatants, carried out by non-state actors.”⁶ The last three characteristics simply reveal that terrorism is a strategy of the weak; that without the resources of the state, groups must resort to unconventional means to accomplish their goals.⁷ The first characteristic, that terrorism is fundamentally political in nature, highlights terrorisms’ *raison d’être*.⁸ Terrorism, therefore, is a political activity. To say that terrorism is a political activity (a form of political violence) is not to say that the objective of terrorism is to establish democratic institutions. Rather, it is to say that terrorism is merely a tactic designed to bring about some change in the exercise of political power. This thesis, therefore, will use the terms “terrorism” and “political violence” to mean the same thing: the use of violence in an attempt to implement an alternative political reality.

The *rational-materialist* approach to understanding terrorism claims that those involved in conducting terrorist attacks are rational actors making a deliberate strategic choice that attempts to achieve material gain through political

⁶ Audrey Kurth Cronin, “How Terrorist Campaigns End,” in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, ed. Tore Bjorgo and John Horgan (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 7.

⁷ Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” *International Security* 31, no. 1 (Summer 2006): 50.

⁸ Kydd and Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” 52; Martha Crenshaw, “The Logic of Suicide Terrorism: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice,” in *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, ed. Walter Reich (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1990), 7; Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 2000), 220.

or socio-economic progress.⁹ The solution to terrorism, therefore, is to provide economic opportunity to the disadvantaged populations where terrorists operate, establish democratic institutions, and promote education to eradicate ignorance among the masses of potential terrorists or terror supporters. This view holds that if people merely had the ability to obtain material means through legitimate and peaceful activities, they would have no reason to engage in political violence. Chief among those that support this view is the influential David Kilcullen who suggests that the GWOT should instead be viewed as “a campaign against a globalized Islamist insurgency.”¹⁰ To defeat this threat, Kilcullen argues for an updated approach to classical counterinsurgency involving a large-scale development program and “representative government.”¹¹ It is argued that by addressing the grievances that fuel the insurgency, terrorism can be defeated. The Washington think tank the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), from which several employees have gone to serve in the Obama administration, echoes this sentiment. CNAS highlights the importance of “creating conditions hostile to extremists.”¹² This explicitly means promoting economic opportunity and democratic institutions among Muslim populations in the Middle East and Western nations.¹³

While all advocates are quick to point out that dealing with the supposed underlying causes of terrorism is not alone sufficient to defeat terrorism, it is not clear that this approach will work, even as a part of a larger anti-terror strategy. Consider evidence concerning the economic assumptions. Research by Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova indicates that even if there is a correlation between

⁹ Crenshaw, “The Logic of Suicide Terrorism: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice,” 7.

¹⁰ David J. Kilcullen, “Countering Global Insurgency,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 4 (2005): 597.

¹¹ Ibid., 611.

¹² Kristen M. Lord, John A. Nagl, and Seth D. Rosen, “Beyond Bullets: A Pragmatic Strategy to Combat Violent Islamist Extremism,” *Center for a New American Security Solarium Strategy Series*, June 9, 2009, <http://www.cnas.org/node/975>, 16.

¹³ Ibid., 17.

terrorism, income and education level, it actually may be positive.¹⁴ They also argue that economic incentives, such as foreign aid may actually incentivize terrorism.¹⁵ Other researchers echo concerns that economic development may increase the threat of political violence. Ethan B. Kapstein points out that economic assistance given to one side in a conflict may have a destabilizing effect due to perceived favoritism.¹⁶

What about the assumption that democracy is the solution to quelling political violence? Michael Freeman has concluded that considering the *actual* grievances underlying Islamic jihad, democracy will be “ineffectual and possibly counterproductive.”¹⁷ In addition, F. Gregory Gause III shows that democratization is harmful in that it will “lead to Islamist domination of Arab politics,” which would certainly be hostile to U.S. interests.¹⁸ Finally, Audrey Kurth Cronin points out that democracy and economic development may be destabilizing as they will create elevated and unrealistic expectations in the minds of the population.¹⁹ She concludes that, “the weight of the available evidence to date does not bear out the idealistic hopes of many in the West that democracy leads to a reduction in terrorism.”²⁰

In fact, the advocates themselves seem to understand this. The earlier mentioned CNAS report indicates twice the dubious link between terrorism,

¹⁴ Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, “Does Poverty Cause Terrorism?” *The New Republic* (June 24, 2002): 32.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁶ Ethan B. Kapstein, “Do Three Ds Make an F? The Limits of ‘Defense, Diplomacy, and Development,’” *Prism* 1, no. 3 (June 2010): 21.

¹⁷ Freeman contends that the four major grievances that fuel the global jihad are perception of occupation, perceived threat to Islamic identity and culture from the West, the economic failures of modernization and the rule of illegitimate authoritarian regimes. Michael Freeman, “Democracy, Al Qaeda, and the Causes of Terrorism: A Strategic Analysis of U.S. Policy,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31 (2008): 53.

¹⁸ F. Gregory Gause III, “Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?” *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (2005): 8.

¹⁹ Audrey Kurth Cronin, “Sources of Contemporary Terrorism,” in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, ed. Audrey Kurth Cronin and James M. Ludes (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

political oppression and poverty.²¹ So too, does Jennifer Windsor, who while advocating a democratization approach as part of an anti-terror strategy, plainly admits the direct link between democracy and terror does not exist.²² While terrorists are motivated by political objectives, clearly there is no evidence to suggest that democratization and economic development are viable parts of any comprehensive anti-terror solution. In other words, *while actors who engage in terrorism and the populations that support them are likely affected by economic inequalities and are motivated by political aspirations, there is little evidence to suggest that democratic institutions or economic development will remove any incentive to engage in political violence.*

Given the overwhelming evidence that the rational model is severely problematic, why then is it such a popular argument? Five explanations are readily available. First, it seems that the popularity stems from cultural bias; the assumption that the rest of the world values freedom, democracy, economic opportunity and the values embedded in those ideals, to the same degree as Westerners. Carnes Lord perhaps explains this best when he says, “Americans tend to assume that concrete interests, such as economic well-being, personal freedom, and security of life and limb are the critical determinants of political behavior everywhere. It is an interesting irony that such a view is so prevalent in a country as fundamentally idealistic as the United States.”²³ The curious use of the term “universal values” in the CNAS report exemplifies this dubious assumption.²⁴

²¹ Lord, Nagl, and Rosen, “Beyond Bullets: A Pragmatic Strategy to Combat Violent Islamist Extremism,” 17, 24.

²² Jennifer L. Windsor, “Promoting Democratization Can Combat Terrorism,” *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 44.

²³ Carnes Lord, “The Psychological Dimension in National Strategy,” in *Political Warfare and Psychological Operations: Rethinking the U.S. Approach*, ed. Carnes Lord and Frank R. Barnett (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1989), 22.

²⁴ Lord, Nagl, and Rosen, “Beyond Bullets: A Pragmatic Strategy to Combat Violent Islamist Extremism,” 22.

Second, while so many proponents are quick to point out that historical success of counterinsurgency campaigns involved these techniques (e.g., political accommodation and economic development), they fail to remember that forced relocations, torture, suspension of individual rights, and repression that often accompanies this method. It is quite likely that it was brutality that explained causation (i.e., changed the behavior of the actors), not economic development or political accommodation.²⁵ Michael A. Cohen points out, “the methods for defeating an insurgency have generally been defined less by an open hand than a clenched fist.”²⁶ From the American experience in the Philippines, the British involvement in Malaysia and Kenya, to the most recent example of the Sri Lanka government against the LTTE; coercion against the civilian population, not accommodation, often lead to the decline of the insurgency. Cohen reminds us that the great counter-insurgent figure David Galula taught that “fear—not hope—is generally the great motivator for civilian populations that find themselves caught in the crossfire.”²⁷

Third, rational-materialist arguments are easy to communicate. Viewing human behavior thorough the lens of a universally applied theory concerning material gain is a convenient way for laypeople to understand a particular phenomena. This proves especially true in Western culture. Robert P. Abelson explains:

[rational materialistic] explanations are enjoy general public endorsement because they are more easily communicated, perhaps more readily learned in childhood, and more serviceable as handy public accounts of many behaviors—political and otherwise—that may not actually have been instrumentally

²⁵ Anne Marlow, “What if Coin Doesn’t Work?” *World Affairs*, May 20, 2010, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/new/blogs/marlowe>.

²⁶ Michael A. Cohen, “The Myth of a Kindler, Gentler War,” *World Policy.org* (June 22, 2010), <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/myth-kinder-gentler-war>.

²⁷ Ibid.

motivated (at least not as theorists model them). This is especially true in our culture, which applauds cleverly calculated action in the service of goal attainment.²⁸

Fourth, the rational-materialist approach may be the most politically feasible option for explaining to the American people and the world what the U.S. strategy will be. U.S. presidents, as leaders of democracies, must continually reconcile the political pressures of domestic audiences and the dynamics of the world community. Robert Putnam refers to this as the “two-level game.”²⁹ While a cultural approach may incite more nationalistic passion from a domestic audience, it will most likely result in international scorn. As such, the rational-materialistic approach may provide the best over-all strategy for the two games that American political leaders play.

Finally, rational-materialist models *do* work in certain scenarios. Rationality theories originally found their usefulness in economics where behavior is subject to limited variables and where “information concerning quality and price are available and transparent and cost minimization dominates our concerns.”³⁰ Over time, rational-materialism was applied to other disciplines, such as sociology, in an attempt to find a general theory that could explain all human behavior, not just economic decisions. The foundation of the rational-materialist application that we are dealing with lies in research that shows that crime, specifically property crime, is accurately predicted by rates of poverty and lack of education.³¹ The rational-materialist approach in understanding property crime is useful, as the decision to engage in this type of crime closely matches a standard cost-benefit analysis where the actor is making an economic choice and is trying to maximize utility. Values, beliefs, and ideology are held constant and

²⁸ Robert P. Abelson, “The Secret Existence of Expressive Behavior,” in *The Rational Choice Controversy*, ed. Jeffrey Friedman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 31.

²⁹ Robert Putnam, “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games,” *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 434.

³⁰ Geoffrey M. Hodgson, “On the Limits of Rational Choice Theory,” *Business School Working Papers UHBS, Economics Paper* 27 (2003–6), <http://hdl.handle.net/2299/691>, 15.

³¹ Scott Atran, “Genesis of Suicide Terrorism,” *Science* 299, no. 5612 (March 2003): 1536.

universal preferences are assumed. Consider the inner city youth who is deciding how to obtain material goods for living. To meet his physical needs, his choices are to either engage in property crime or pursue higher education. Given the socio-economic barriers to higher education for this individual, he chooses property crime, which accords with the rational-materialist model. Unfortunately, it has become popular to apply this model broadly beyond its appropriate application. This model does not carry over to other types of human behavior (e.g., political violence). Why is this?

Simply put, humans are not singularly focused on the pursuit of material gain. This seems a statement of the obvious, yet rational-materialistic explanations are predicated on this assumption. Consequently, when material concerns dominate, rational-materialism is sufficient to explain human behavior and useful for policy prescriptions. However, what is the result when material concerns fade from prominence? Rational-materialistic assumptions no longer apply and strategy derived from those assumptions is potentially ineffective at best and counter-productive at worst. There is a real danger here as Hodgson notes:

The problem of such a theory [rational-materialist] is that, in its excessive quest for generality, it will fail to focus on the historically and geographically specific features of the socio-economic systems that we wish to study and understand. As long as social theory is confined to generalities it will remain highly limited in dealing with any specific socio-economic system, including the one in which we live.³²

Hence, so long as rational-materialist assumptions about the nature of political violence are held, a useful understanding of contemporary political violence seems out of reach.

The second theory attempting to explain the causes of terrorism is *cultural determinism*. Here the values, beliefs, attitudes, goals, and behavior of groups of people determine when, where, and how conflict will occur. Foremost among the

³² Hodgson, "On the Limits of Rational Choice Theory," 16.

proponents of this view is Samuel P. Huntington. Huntington describes conflict in terms of the “clash of civilizations” where the West, no longer the dominating colonizing force it once was, will have to compete with non-Western societies.³³ Huntington’s broad analysis at the civilization level predicts the most virulent of these conflicts will be between Islamic (and Confucian) states and the West, and observes that Islam has “bloody borders.”³⁴ Additionally, Mark Juergensmeyer introduces the concept of cosmic war, which is fueled more specifically by religious fervor, and refers to “metaphysical conflicts between good and evil.”³⁵ He observes, for example, that the “struggle that Bin Laden describes ultimately as not one of political and economic issues but between transcendent and worldly goals, a struggle between religion and anti-religion.”³⁶ He notes that conflict can be characterized as cosmic war when it is seen to be in defense of “basic identity and dignity,” when losing would be intolerable, and when the fight cannot be won with human effort alone.³⁷ Finally, Stephen Collins Coughlin argues that the motivating factor that drives radical Islamic jihadist is not poverty or repression, but Islamic law itself, which underpins jihadist militant doctrine.³⁸ He submits that America is in a war of ideas with Islam, yet fails to acknowledge it.

The strength of the cultural model seems self-evident, particularly as it relates to Islam, as Huntington points out that conflict “occurs between Muslims, on the one hand, and Orthodox Serbs in the Balkans, Jews in Israel, Hindus in India, Buddhists in Burma and Catholics in the Philippines.”³⁹ To that list, we can add more recent struggles in the Sahel, Indonesia and in Muslim enclaves in the

³³ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993): 23.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 35, 48.

³⁵ Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 149.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Stephen Collins Coughlin, “To Our Greatest Detriment: Ignoring What Experts Say About *Jihad*” (Master’s thesis, National Defense Intelligence College, 2007), 226.

³⁹ Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?,” 35.

West. Jihadists' own statements about their motivations and opinion polls of Muslim populations supportive of Al Qaeda's goals reveal a cultural chasm that appears to fuel the flames of violence.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, this model is also severely problematic for three reasons. First, to explain terrorism or any form of political violence using culture, researchers have to account for variations in violence over time and space.⁴¹ Not all Muslim societies, for example, have been equally violent throughout the religion's history and in all countries.⁴² Because of this variation, culture cannot be held as the causal variable in understanding political violence unless it is held as constant. When done so, however, empirical tests of culture are inconclusive.⁴³ Culture does indeed change and various parts of cultures are more or less expressed in different ways at different times. Consider the difference in behavior between the Japanese citizens before and after WWII (imperialistic vs. non-imperialistic), East and West Germany during the cold war (capitalism vs. communism) or in North and South Korea today (democracy vs. totalitarianism). The aspects of each culture compared above are virtually identical, but variance in a whole host of factors resulted in changed behavior of the actors. Essentially, this leaves us with the reality that, while components of culture are most likely the driving force in terrorism, there is essentially no way to conclusively explain exactly how this happens with a general theory that applies to all political behavior.

Second, for many, blaming aspects of culture is very unpopular. A wholesale indictment of a religion and the people that practice it appears to go against the values and norms practiced in the West. Even having a conversation

⁴⁰ Steven Kull, "Muslim Public Opinion on U.S. Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda," *World Public Opinion.org*, April 24, 2007, http://www.fcni.org/pdfs/middle_east/muslim_public_opinion_pipa.pdf, 21–22.

⁴¹ Michael Mousseau, "Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror," *International Security* 27, no. 3 (Winter 2002/2003): 27.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴³ Robert W. Jackman and Ross A. Miller, "Social Capital and Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 1 (1998): 59.

about religion can prove difficult. Consequently, since the events of 9/11 (where 19 individuals espousing Islamic views conducted attacks in the name of “Allah”) public discourse on the relationship between Islam and terrorism has been severely limited and often awkward. Frequently, those desiring to explore the possible connections between religious motivation and political violence do so poorly and face harsh scrutiny. This discourages further discussion. Even when a more accurate and nuanced explanation of cultural variables is explored, the resistance to the effort is still strong. Some advocates of the cultural approach have even paid a personal and professional price for advancing their views, even when attempting to do so professionally and objectively.⁴⁴

Finally, the international community is likely to react negatively to such an approach. Referring back to the two-level game described by Putnam, American policy makers must not only respond to the demands of domestic audiences but also must account for the realities of the international system as well. This cultural approach runs this risk of being distasteful to the international community, particularly potential partners in the Middle Eastern community and in Europe.

Are any other solutions, given the failure of both these approaches, in understanding the root causes of terrorism? What about models that include useful aspects of rational-materialism and cultural determinism? Recognizing the current problems with both models, researchers, such as Michael Mousseau, propose an institutional argument. This rational model suggests that it is the quality and structure of institutions that determines the stability of a society. Mousseau does not deny the importance of culture; rather he shows how “liberal-democratic values and beliefs are embedded in the economic infrastructure that prevails in market democracies.”⁴⁵ His institutional model, however, treats culture

⁴⁴ Major Collins was removed from his position at the Pentagon because of his attempts to help senior leaders understand violent Islamism from the perspective of Islamic law. Andrew G. Bostom, “Saving Major Coughlin,” *American Thinker*, January 15, 2008, http://www.americanthinker.com/2008/01/saving_major_coughlin.html.

⁴⁵ Mousseau, “Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror,” 6.

as endogenous, or because of, varying types of institutions. This differs from the cultural model, which treats culture as exogenous, or as an independent variable. The solution to defeat terrorism using this model is to promote the transformation of clientalist economies, currently the norm in the Middle East, to market economies. Clientalist economies rely on implied cooperation and reciprocity, where in market economies, obligations and cooperation are explicit in legal contracts.⁴⁶ This creates liberal values as Mousseau explains:

The norm of cooperating with strangers on the basis of legal equality is the logical prerequisite for respecting the rule of common law...in these ways, markets develop and the liberal values of individualism, universalism, tolerance, and equity emerge concurrently with the rule of common law and democratic governance.⁴⁷

It is this exposure to the market economy through globalization and its embedded liberal values that is responsible for anti-market rage that expresses itself through terrorism. The solution therefore is to break the clientalist market and begin to replace it with the foundations of a market economy.⁴⁸

The advantage of this approach is that it takes the apparent strengths of the rational model (the objectivity of observable behavior) and marries it with the reality that cultural differences enable violence to produce a workable theory that can be empirically proven.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, the institutional model has two primary weaknesses. First, it suffers from endogeneity. This is the problem of determining what causes what. Do institutions determine culture as he assumes, or does culture shape institutions? For example, market economies and Western civilization developed simultaneously, so which came first? Mousseau argues that the causal link between market economies and liberal values is ironclad, but the ongoing debate on the issue of “social capital” suggests the jury is still out on

⁴⁶ Mousseau, “Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror,” 10.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 9.

the exact nature of the causal relationship.⁵⁰ The second weakness of this approach is the assumption that laying the foundations of a market economy will actually lead to a market economy, and that the market economy will actually function optimally, regardless of the societal that framework it is laid upon. Mousseau's argument calls for the imposition of the foundations of a market economy on the Middle East, but why is this expected to birth liberal values, since anger about those very market economies is fueling terrorism?⁵¹ Should we expect these nations, who chafe at rubbing against market economies because of globalism, to embrace it when it is rammed down their throats? I see no reason to suspect they will.

When viewed in the light of the previous theories that attempt to explain the causes of terrorism, it is clear that the U.S. has pursued a strategy predicated upon the rational-materialist model. The first document that codified U.S. anti-terror strategy after 9/11 was the National Security Strategy of 2002. In this, and in the revised 2006 document, President George W. Bush laid out his vision for dealing with terrorism. Democratization was offered as the primary prescription for the problem, with large doses of economic development thrown in as well. In fact, in the 2006 document, two pillars were presented as the foundation to the strategy: the first pillar was promoting democracy and economic prosperity and the second was working with democracies to defeat terror.⁵² This changed little with the election of President Barak Obama. While the primary focus on democracy was gone from the rhetoric, the Obama strategy continues the emphasis on democratization and development.⁵³ Both Presidents also stressed building more effective institutions for combating terrorism. While these are not

⁵⁰ Jackman and Miller, "Social Capital and Politics," 50. This debate is essentially a "chicken or the egg" problem. Did institutions give rise to culture or did culture inform the nature of institutions?

⁵¹ Mousseau, "Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror," 25.

⁵² George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, September 2002 and March 2006), Introduction.

⁵³ Obama, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Introduction.

explicitly market economy institutions, they do express belief in the notion that crafting the appropriate political and economic structures will result in the growth of liberal values.

While cultural determinism is rightly rejected in U.S. strategy, the unfortunate side effect has been to reject discussion of any cultural aspects and how they might contribute to motivating political violence. As Coughlin points out, George W. Bush “made broad statements that held Islam harmless...effectively placing a policy bar on the unconstrained analysis of Islamic doctrine as a basis for this threat.”⁵⁴ Islam was said to be a “religion of peace” and “hijacked by extremists,” and the President’s comments made it clear that while culture (religion) might be an issue, we would not be talking about it or evaluating it with any depth. President Obama furthered this rejection of cultural factors by completely removing the term *jihad* from the *National Security Strategy of 2010* and continues to insist that Islam has nothing to do with the U.S.’s current struggle.⁵⁵ The repeated use of the term “universal values” in the 2010 document shuts the door to exploration of the cultural factors by effectively proclaiming that cultural differences are not at the root of the problem.

In this way, the U.S. has demonstrated its belief in the assumption that the broadly applied rational-materialist concept adequately explains the underlying causes of terrorism and has pursued a strategy according to this model. Cultural determinism has been rejected, and with it, any exploration of cultural factors that may be contributing to motivating political violence. This is significant in that, on the one hand, U.S. strategy is rooted in assumptions that have been shown to be ineffective in dealing with the underlying causes of political violence, while on the other hand, U.S. policy makers refuse to explore the messy, but perhaps informative, world of cultural motivations.

⁵⁴ Coughlin, ““To Our Greatest Detriment: Ignoring What Experts Say About *Jihad*,” 4.

⁵⁵ Obama, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 20.

It seems clear that a general theory explaining the underlying causes of terrorism, whether rational-materialism, cultural determinism or derivations thereof is simply unavailable. In evaluating the role of social science in counterterrorism, Nicholas Lemann comes to the same conclusion. He points the dearth of “logic that can be counted on to apply in all cases.”⁵⁶ Later, in making the case that terrorism belongs in the political realm, Lemann continues, “[Terrorism is] a tactic whose aims bleed into the larger, endless struggle of people to control land, set up governments, and exercise power. History is about managing that struggle, sometimes successfully, sometimes not, rather than eliminating the impulses that underlie it.”

This conclusion highlights two important points. First, trying to approach terrorism from a general theory that identifies underlying causes will prove fruitless, as we have already discovered. Subsequently, developing policy based on a general theory about terrorism, as the U.S. has done, is predestined to fail. Second, if Lemann is correct, we must ask what are the important components of “managing that struggle,” and how can we harness them to our advantage? Earlier in his essay, Lemann provides a possible answer. In critiquing General David Petraus’s approach to counterinsurgency, which contends that the *minimum* use of force is the most effective, Lemann quotes Mark Moyer who points out the significant effectiveness of “aggressive and well-led operations” that negatively affect the insurgency.⁵⁷ Does this suggest that the application of force has something to do with the outcome of politically violent behavior? Is the appropriate use of force *the* way to “manage” those underlying “impulses” of terrorism and political violence? This will be explored in depth later.

Here, however, it is imperative to discard the previously discussed general theories that erroneously attempt to explain all political behavior and focus on the problem at hand. Namely, the direct threat to the U.S. posed by Islamists who

⁵⁶ Nicholas Lemann, “Terrorism Studies: Social Scientists do Counterinsurgency,” *The New Yorker* (April 26, 2010), http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2010/04/26/100426crbo_books_lemann.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

employ, advocate for or sympathize with the use of violence to achieve their political goals. Recognizing the failure of the previous models to explain this phenomenon adequately, it may prove more useful to select instances in history where the U.S. was successful in dealing with an identical or near identical problem, and determining what factors were important in leading to success or failure. From this, it may be possible to identify key elements in addressing groups who employ political violence in the furtherance of their objectives.

The next two chapters will explore two cases; the first is that of the Patriot movement, which emanated from the American Mid-West and was most potent in the 1990s. The second is that of violent Islamists, most notably Al Qaeda, whom the U.S. contends with today. I will place these groups in a population called “religious rebels.”⁵⁸ Religious rebels are identified first by their partial or full adherence to supernaturally derived norms and preference ordering. Second, religious rebels participate in and/or support violent resistance against the established political order for establishing a political reality commensurate with their particular worldview.

These religious rebel groups in the following cases present the two most significant non-state threats to American political power in contemporary times, and they share four key characteristics. First, these groups can trace their explosive rise in popularity to turbulent conditions. In both cases, severe economical turmoil brought on by the effects of globalization destroyed the traditional worldview of both rural Americans and many in the Middle East, causing them to cast about for an explanation to make sense of their new environment. Second, to explain these new conditions, both groups latched on to violent ideologies rooted in religion. Third, both groups display the similar organizational characteristics of small and loose networks. Lastly, the goals of both movements are identical. They do not recognize the U.S. government as a legitimate source of political power, they desire to remove U.S. government

⁵⁸ Eli Berman and David D. Laitin, “Religion, Terrorism and Public Goods: Testing the Club Model,” *Journal of Public Economics* 92 (2008): 1943.

authority from their local area, and they act to establish alternate power structures. The purpose of outlining the striking similarities between these religious rebels is to show they may be considered interchangeable. In each case study, the U.S. government's response to both groups will be considered. From this examination, insight about the true nature of religious rebellion can be obtained.

Heretofore, this thesis has considered the general theories that attempt to explain the underlying causes of political violence. None has proven adequate for dealing with the particular situation the U.S. government faces concerning religious rebels. This is due primarily to the failure of models that attempt to explain human behavior exclusively in terms of material gain and the inability to tease out crucial cultural factors in explaining terrorism. The following examination of religious rebels is not intended to present a working universal theory on the nature of all political violence; rather, it explores how the U.S. government responded to these groups and attempts to distill lessons that can be incorporated in strategy regarding these movements in the future.

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III. THE PATRIOTS

The Patriot movement represented the most serious domestic threat to U.S. government authority since the tumultuous events of the 1960s. The ease with which Patriots chose violence as a means to achieve political change proved to be a serious challenge the American government. Ultimately, however, the government prevailed. This chapter will describe the conditions that brought about these Patriot groups, explore the role ideology played in the movement, explain the organizational characteristics of Patriot groups and examine how the U.S. government responded to this threat.

It is useful to define exactly what is meant by the term “Patriot.” While the Patriot movement includes a diverse constituency of groups, it does coalesce around a specific set of beliefs and ideologies. As David Neiwert describes:

The Patriot movement is an American political ideology based on an ultranationalistic and selective populism, which seeks to return the nation to its “constitutional” roots—that is, a system based on white Christian male rule. Its core myth is that such a reactionary revolution will bring about a great national rebirth, ending years of encroaching moral and political decadence wrought by a gigantic world conspiracy of probably Satanic origins.⁵⁹

The term “Patriot movement” (which Neiwert uses because its members use the term for themselves) includes groups, such as Neo-Nazis, adherents to Christian Identity, Sovereign Citizens, the Freeman, and many others. This movement is characterized by a dubious interpretation of the Protestant Bible and the U.S. Constitution. While the bombing by Timothy McVeigh of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995 is the most memorable event involving this movement, it was essentially the last major violent incident wrought by groups associated with this ideology. The other significant violent events of the

⁵⁹ David A. Neiwert, *In God's Country: The Patriot Movement and the Pacific Northwest* (Pullman: The University of Washington Press, 1999), 4.

1990s, the stand-offs at Ruby Ridge and Waco, were also the result of the clash between the U.S. government and the people adhering to Patriot ideals who accepted that violence was an appropriate tool to advance their worldview.

A. ECONOMIC TURMOIL

The rise of the Patriot movement can trace its beginnings to massive economic disruptions brought on by globalization. For most Patriots, the crisis began in the late 1970s. Globalization drove prices for crops so low that farmers were encouraged to “get big or get out.”⁶⁰ Only by increasing output, farmers were told, would they be able to compete in the new global economy. Government lenders and private banks, which were chief among the voices persuading the farmers to take on debt, offered cheap credit and farmers were encouraged to buy as much land as they could. Consequently, farmland prices skyrocketed, and credit became so cheap that bankers would often call farmers and encourage them to assume more debt.⁶¹

This ended in 1979, when the Federal Reserve sharply raised interest rates to curtail massive inflation. The move caused farm property values to fall at the very same time the interest rates on bank notes dramatically increased. This resulted in farm families being thrown off their farms in droves. From 1980 to 1990, around 700,000 small to medium family farms were shut down.⁶² During 1986 to 1987, during the worst years of the crisis, nearly one million people were removed from their land.

While the most visible, the farmers were not the only ones affected. All of rural America felt the impact of globalization. Domestic manufacturing companies moved operations overseas to take advantage of cheap labor they previously

⁶⁰ Osha Gray Davidson, *Broken Heartland: The Rise of America's Rural Ghetto* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996), 15.

⁶¹ Joel Dyer, *Harvest of Rage: Why Oklahoma City is Only the Beginning* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 15.

⁶² Stuart A. Wright, *Patriots, Politics, and the Oklahoma City Bombing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 72.

found in rural America. In 1979, only 5% of non-metropolitan counties in the U.S. had an unemployment rate of 9% or higher, in 1984, that number jumped to 50 percent.⁶³ The economy of rural America was devastated by the effects of globalization in the last part of the twentieth century.

The results were predictable. The suicide rate of farmers in the state of Oklahoma rose to over three times that of the general population, and that state trailed both Montana and Wisconsin in total number of farm suicides.⁶⁴ While economic woes touched off the crisis that lead to the suicides, it was not necessarily for lack of money that farmers killed themselves. Many farmers who lost their land during the farm crisis were the third, fourth, or even fifth generations that worked their land. Far from just being a source of income, farm life, and indeed rural life in general, served as a source of core identity for many people.⁶⁵ The turmoil resulted in more than financial troubles, as the land the farmers were thrown off represented family and faith. Farmers often described the loss of the farm as harder than losing a loved one.⁶⁶ That so many farmers committed suicide suggests that as they looked about for an explanation of who was to blame for their situation, farmers focused on the person in the mirror. That would all change, however, with the introduction of an ideology that placed the blame on someone else: the government.

B. VIOLENT RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGIES

The second characteristic of both the Patriots and violent Islamists is the prevalent role that religion plays in their ideology. This was part of a larger trend in religious violence at the end of the last century that David Rapaport termed the

⁶³ Dyer, *Harvest of Rage: Why Oklahoma City is Only the Beginning*, 17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

“fourth wave” of terrorism.⁶⁷ Chief among Rapoport’s examples are Islamists and Patriots. Similarly, when Mark Juergensmeyer explains his concept of “cosmic war,” the first two examples he points to are Islamists and Patriots.⁶⁸ This is because it is widely accepted that Patriots and violent Islamists both internalize a violent ideology rooted in their respective religious traditions.

In America, the devastation wrought by the destroyed rural economy left a void that was quickly filled by the diverse, but religiously grounded, anti-government messages of groups like the Posse Comitatus, Christian Identity, Neo Nazis and others. Their conspiratorial message placed the blame for the current economic crisis on the government. In fact, it was their view that the government, controlled by a cabal of Jews, deliberately established a system in which the farmers were destined to fail.⁶⁹ Given that the government and banks had encouraged farmers to leverage themselves to precarious levels, this made sense to some. The narrative was only vaguely embedded in the largely Protestant rural culture, but it was familiar enough that it resonated with many facing extreme hardship, as well as their friends and loved ones who bore witness to the suffering. The resulting worldview, which blended aspects of mutant Protestantism, white supremacy, Jewish conspiracy, and the corruption of the U.S. government, was essentially grounded in the notion that the U.S. government’s power was illegitimate.

C. LOOSE NETWORKS

The third shared characteristic of both groups is how they organized in a similar fashion of loose networks with limited central authority. This is largely a result of their pressures from their operational environment and reliance on pre-formed social arrangements.

⁶⁷ David C. Rapoport, “The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism,” in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of A Grand Strategy*, ed. Audrey Kurth Cronin and James M. Ludes (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 61.

⁶⁸ Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 145.

⁶⁹ Wright, *Patriots, Politics, and the Oklahoma City Bombing*, 82.

The American Patriot movement flourished among the rural relationships established from shared hardship and mutual interest. Support groups, the internet and the gun show circuit acted as convenient conduits for the message to spread.⁷⁰ Additionally, suicide counselors (who were key figures in the early days of the farm crisis) choosing between the lesser of two evils, often referred hurting farmers to groups promoting the Patriot's message.⁷¹ Law enforcement scrutiny would not allow the movement to coalesce around an organized hierarchy of leaders. Public promoters of violent anti-government rhetoric were soon identified and investigated. Violent confrontations with law enforcement almost always resulted in sovereignty adherents being killed. In recognition of the operational environment, sovereignty advocates, such as Louis Beam proposed the idea of "leaderless resistance."⁷² Beam realized that a loose network of individuals and small groups bound by similar ideology was the only possible organizational structure that could survive increased government attention.

D. REJECTION OF U.S. POLITICAL SOVEREIGNTY

Lastly, the Patriot movement and the violent Islamists share similar goals. Both groups resist submission to the political will of the U.S. government, want to drive the U.S. out of their political sphere and establish a new government based on alternative notions of sovereignty.

A major reason the Patriot movement rejects the sovereignty of the U.S. government is the failure of the American legal system to represent properly (in the minds of the Patriots) the interests of rural America. As banks began to take over farms at an alarming rate, desperate farmers were all too ready to submit to an alternate form of government that promised to look out for their concerns. This alternate system revolved around "common law courts." Common law courts consisted of a "jury" of "sovereign citizens." To qualify as a sovereign citizen,

⁷⁰ Wright, *Patriots, Politics, and the Oklahoma City Bombing*, 83, 116.

⁷¹ Dyer, *Harvest of Rage: Why Oklahoma City is Only the Beginning*, 53.

⁷² Louis Beam, "Leaderless Resistance," *The Seditonist*, <http://louisbeam.com/>.

Patriots simply reject their U.S. citizenship.⁷³ This often occurred in the form of a written declaration to a local, state, federal or international authority.”⁷⁴ These courts, established in lieu of the U.S. political and legal system, pass judgments amenable to the Patriot cause. These judgments range from indictments of public officials for failing to abide by their constitutional duties to reversing foreclosures on farms. The significance of the common law courts should not be ignored; they essentially provide the moral authority the Patriots need to conduct operations, especially violent ones, against the U.S. government.

E. FAILURE OF U.S. GOVERNMENT TO RECOGNIZE THE THREAT

Given the economic crisis occurring in the American heartland and the subsequent tearing at the social fabric that it created, the U.S. government should have anticipated problems with Patriot groups.⁷⁵ Community meetings, bank foreclosure events and suicide hotlines filled with angry rhetoric about the government conspiracy to destroy farmers, but Patriots went even further to telegraph their intent. A popular tactic of this group was to write letters to government authorities stating that they no longer viewed the U.S. government as legitimate and would no longer to its laws. In fact, Vicky Weaver, who was later shot in the head by an FBI sniper while holding her baby during the Ruby Ridge stand off, wrote such a letter to the U.S. attorney for Idaho.⁷⁶ Also, people in sovereign groups would often post notices on their property that told visitors that the federal government had no jurisdiction on their land. In addition, on Randy Weaver’s U.S. Marshall’s file, he was simply labeled as uncooperative

⁷³ David A. Neiwert, *In God’s Country: The Patriot Movement and the Pacific Northwest* (Pullman: The University of Washington Press, 1999), 97.

⁷⁴ Perhaps the most interesting example of this is the efforts of the members of the “Republic of Texas,” who distributed their declaration of independence to every embassy in the world, all U.S. state governors and all military installations in Texas. Dyer, *Harvest of Rage: Why Oklahoma City is Only the Beginning*, 202.

⁷⁵ Dyer, *Harvest of Rage: Why Oklahoma City is Only the Beginning*, 19.

⁷⁶ Jess Walter, *Every Knee Shall Bow: The Truth and Tragedy of Ruby Ridge & the Randy Weaver Family* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 124–125.

and a “crackpot.”⁷⁷ These descriptions of him, however, did not accurately convey Weaver’s attitude. Weaver was not uncooperative; he was defiant to the point of death. There existed plenty of clues that clearly signaled the intent of people in the sovereignty movement.

This inaccurate view of the threat directly resulted in the failure of the U.S. to counter the threats posed by these groups effectively. In the case of the Patriot movement, the U.S. Marshalls and the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) both launched tactical raids on the Ruby Ridge and Waco compounds that resulted in the death of federal agents. Despite the threats expressed by the groups and despite the intelligence gathered from inside the respective compounds about their apocalyptic ideology, the federal agents who planned the raids did not anticipate the virulent resistance that the Weaver family and the followers of Koresh would mount.

F. THE U.S. GOVERNMENT OVERREACTS

Regardless of the failure to anticipate the threat, the U.S. was caught off guard at the ability of these groups to inflict damage. The surprising performance of these groups against the government caused a significant overreaction. At Ruby Ridge, U.S. Marshalls knowingly provoked Randy Weaver’s dog and then killed the dog as it tried to play with them in full view of Randy’s fourteen-year old son Samuel. As the agents had not yet identified themselves, Samuel opened fire to protect his dog, and the resulting firefight killed one U.S. Marshall and Samuel. After the six, well-armed U.S. Marshalls were dislodged from the mountain by the now dead teenager and a family friend, the FBI crisis response group that assumed command of the operation suspended the traditional rules of engagement and allowed for the immediate killing of any adult male with a weapon.⁷⁸ The result was that Vicky Weaver was shot in the head while holding

⁷⁷ Walter, *Every Knee Shall Bow: The Truth and Tragedy of Ruby Ridge & the Randy Weaver Family*, 127.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

the door open for her husband who was running back into the house after being shot himself. Similarly, the BATF lost four agents conducting a military style raid against a group of people adhering to an apocalyptic worldview. Again, the FBI was brought in to assume command and the end result was the death by fire of over 76 people, including over 20 children. These results were absolutely unacceptable to the American public and gave rise to a growing concern in the country that the narrative of the Patriot groups, which was previously dismissed, might actually have some merit. Congress called various members of the sovereignty movement to testify, Phil Donohue hosted a group of militia members on his show and John Trochmann, the leader of the Militia of Montana, won a debate hosted by the Yale Student Political Union over the issue. These people would have been considered loons in any other context, but the overreaction of the U.S. government validated their worldview in the eyes of many Americans.

G. THE U.S. GOVERNMENT ADJUSTS

In the wake of the Ruby Ridge and Waco debacles, law enforcement agencies in the U.S. government changed their policies on how to deal with ideological dissidents. Previously, law enforcement officers were accustomed to dealing with criminals who typically responded to overwhelming force with compliance. Understanding, however, that apocalyptic ideology was part and parcel with the Patriot movement and that the assaulting agents were seen as the devil incarnate, new law enforcement procedures were identified.⁷⁹ This approach did not eliminate the use of force against these groups; they simply altered the way force was used. For example, once a standoff ensued, the FBI placed command of operations against sovereignty groups in the hands of negotiators, not the tactical teams. Additionally, the FBI was very careful to control the surrounding environment without rushing to dislodge barricaded subjects. The first opportunity to try out these new tactics occurred at the Freeman standoff in Montana in 1996. Over the course of a year, the FBI slowly

⁷⁹ Neiwert, *In God's Country: The Patriot Movement and the Pacific Northwest*, 240.

and methodically tightened its noose around the Freeman group. It even allowed the group to move locations. The slow process diffused any support that the Freeman may have gotten from the outside. Instead of playing to the hand of the Freeman, the FBI wielded decisive force over the group and caused it to fracture under its own weight. The standoff ended without incident. This application of force, which recognized the role that ideology played in the Patriot movement, allowed the U.S. government to capitalize on the perception of public opinion further as it swung away from these groups in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. The way in which the U.S. government conducted the Freeman standoff, and the subsequent Republic of Texas standoff, severely damaged Patriot groups and signaled the beginning of the movements decline.⁸⁰

Brought about by economic turmoil and fueled by a violent ideology with roots in rural culture, the Patriot movement proved to be a significant challenge to the U.S. government. By recognizing the role ideology played in the movement, however, the U.S. government was able to craft a strategy that ultimately lead to the decline of the movement.

⁸⁰ Lane Crothers, *Rage on the Right: The American Militia Movement from Ruby Ridge to Homeland Security* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 156.

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IV. VIOLENT ISLAMISTS

Any remaining concerns about the Patriot movement took a back seat to violent Islamists after the devastating attacks of September 11, 2001. Al Qaeda, the chief violent Islamist group, embodies the values that define the movement. This chapter will examine how this movement came about, outline the organizational characteristics of violent Islamists, and explore how the U.S. government has responded to this threat.

While more fresh in the public mind, it is still useful to define exactly who are “violent Islamists.” Violent Islamists, quite simply, hold that Islam is to be viewed not just as a religion but a political system directing all aspects of public and private life and that this worldview is to be realized through any means possible, including armed force.

A. ECONOMIC TURMOIL

Like the Patriot movement, violent Islamism has benefited from economic turbulence. Statist economic policies combined with the oil boom (which was brought on by global demand for petroleum products) in Middle Eastern countries caused massive rural-urban migration in the 1960s and 1970s.⁸¹ Traditional identity markers, such as being Arab or Muslim, decreased in significance, replaced by Arab Nationalism and reliance on the welfare state.⁸² In the 1980s and 1990s, the oil market crashed, and Middle Eastern governments were unable to make good on their promises. The variance between expectations and reality for many Muslims proved too great.⁸³ The inability of young, semi-educated Muslims to find fulfillment in a career and marriage created a serious

⁸¹ Alan Richards, “Toward a Political Economy of Islamism: Grievances and Collective Action,” unpublished manuscript, 5.

⁸² Nazhi Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London: Routledge, 1991), 167.

⁸³ Michael Freeman, “Democracy, Al Qaeda, and the Causes of Terrorism: A Strategic Analysis of U.S. Policy,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31 (2008): 50.

identity crisis in a culture that still valued traditional norms.⁸⁴ The failure of the secular order created space for violent Islamists to spread the message that salvation would only result from turning toward Allah for all solutions for the problems facing Muslims. This was certainly the case for Osama Bin Laden and his associates as Steve Coll illustrates,

The combustible interactions of wealth [and lack of wealth] and Islamic faith, Bedouin tradition and global culture, had opened deep fault lines in the Saudi kingdom. Osama bin Laden had fallen through the cracks, and here he was, in a mud-walled compound on the outskirts of Kandahar, preaching revolution.⁸⁵

B. VIOLENT RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGY

In the Middle East, the message of the Muslim Brotherhood, Al Qaeda, and others found large appeal in many respects, *because* it is embedded in Islamic culture. The economic conditions described above only served to fuel the spread.⁸⁶ Faced with the rampant march of secularism, the failure to defeat the Jewish state and the economic prowess of the West, salvation presented itself in the form of the return to fundamentalist Islam. Muslim thinkers, such as Mawdudi, Qutb, and Khomeini had already laid the ideological groundwork required for the movement to spread in the 1960s.⁸⁷ Osama bin Laden and his associates elevated the cause to all out global war in the 1980s and 1990s. Islamism benefitted in this environment in many respects, because it was untainted and unassociated with the failed secular ideologies of nationalism and socialism.⁸⁸ As with the case of the Patriot movement, the result was catastrophic.

⁸⁴ Richards, "Toward a Political Economy of Islamism," 4.

⁸⁵ Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 50.

⁸⁶ William R. Keylor, *A World of Nations: The International Order since 1945*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 457.

⁸⁷ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2002), 5.

⁸⁸ Freeman, "Democracy, Al Qaeda, and the Causes of Terrorism: A Strategic Analysis of U.S. Policy," 50.

C. LOOSE NETWORKS

Repressive Middle Eastern governments and effective Western law enforcement and military capabilities convinced violent Islamists that small and loose networks were the only organization that would allow them to effectively fight.⁸⁹ While the nature of the networks has changed over time, the reality remains that violent Islamist must operate in small and loose networks. Mark Sageman presents his “three waves of radicalization” to describe how these networks developed over time.⁹⁰ The first wave consists of the veteran of Soviet war in Afghanistan, of which maybe a couple dozen exist today. The second wave is educated expatriates from Muslim countries radicalized in the West who journeyed to Afghanistan seeking acceptance and training from Al Qaeda. These are the cohort that conducted the 9/11 attacks and number approximately 100 today. Lastly, are the potential thousands of local recruits who are believers in the Al Qaeda cause who have used personal relationships with other violent Islamists and the internet to maintain only the loose connections required to continue operations? Channeling Louis Beam, Abu Musab al-Suri a.k.a Mustapha Setmariam Nasr, wrote “The Call to Global Leaderless Resistance,” which “is a strategy of fighting an overwhelming enemy using self-organizing clandestine networks.”⁹¹ Just like the Patriots, violent Islamists consist of like-minded groups that reduce their operational risk by reducing their linkages to each other and centralized leadership.

D. REJECTION OF U.S. POLITICAL SOVEREIGNTY

Violent Islamists explicitly call for the expulsion of U.S. political influence, not only directly in the case of American military power, but also in the form of U.S. support to secular Middle Eastern regimes and Israel. In his 1996

⁸⁹ Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 144.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 48–49.

⁹¹ Ibid., 144.

Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places, Osama Bin Laden declares that American military forces (who incidentally are the primary reason that economic troubles have been visited upon Saudi Arabia) must be driven out of the Middle East. In his 1998 *Fatwa*, (which was also signed by other Islamists from Pakistan, Egypt, and Bangladesh) Bin Laden again called for the expulsion of American power from the “lands of Islam.” Islamists have been successful at various times establishing some form of Islamic government in places, such as Afghanistan, Somalia, and the Sudan. Ultimately, the goal of violent Islamists (and the dream of many moderate Muslims) is to establish the Caliphate, placing all historically Muslim lands under the control of an Islamist government, replacing the secular nation-state system advocated by the U.S. in place today.⁹² Whether in Montana or Mecca, both the Patriots and violent Islamists seek to drive out U.S. political influence and replace it with a system of their own design.

E. FAILURE OF U.S. GOVERNMENT TO RECOGNIZE THE THREAT

Osama Bin Laden clearly signaled his intent against the U.S. government in his 1996 *Declaration of War* and 1998 *Fatwa*, which both preceded the U.S. embassy bombings in Africa, the attack on the U.S.S. Cole and the 9/11 attacks. Despite plenty of evidence of a serious threat, the response of the U.S. government to these signals indicated a lack of understanding and a dismissive attitude. Steve Coll has laid out in detail the failure of the U.S. government to understand the significance of the threat posed by Al Qaeda adequately. Aside for Bin Laden’s declarations, U.S. government intelligence understood very clearly as early as 1998 that Al Qaeda intended to attack inside the United States.⁹³ The U.S. government failed to act against Bin Laden, however, because they did not

⁹² Karl Vick, “Reunified Islam: Unlikely but Not Entirely Radical,” *The Washington Post* (January 14, 2006), http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/13/AR2006011301816_pf.html.

⁹³ Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, 421.

adequately understand the threat and therefore the political costs we presumed too high.⁹⁴ By late 2000, despite “weekly” indications that Al Qaeda was preparing “spectacular” attacks against the U.S., the American government continued to take no action against Bin Laden.⁹⁵ Ultimately, despite the previous World Trade Center attack, the knowledge that terrorist operatives were learning to fly passenger aircraft and mounting evidence that Al Qaeda was planning a spectacular attack, the U.S. completely failed to anticipate the attacks on 9/11.⁹⁶

F. THE U.S. GOVERNMENT OVERREACTS

The U.S. government’s initial invasion of Afghanistan with small numbers of special operations forces was not only successful in routing the Taliban and disrupting Al Qaeda, but also was widely seen as a legitimate response to 9/11. Unfortunately, the subsequent occupation of Afghanistan, along with the occupation of Iraq, is viewed by many in the Muslim world as an attack on Islam writ large.^{97,98} America, fresh from the attacks of 9/11, invaded Iraq ostensibly to remove the potential threat of the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against American targets. This was deemed necessary in a post 9/11 world. After WMD were never found, mission success was then defined by the existence of a self-sustaining democratic government, restored security apparatus and rehabilitated infrastructure. In order to accomplish this, however, the U.S. military was required to stay and provide the heavy lifting for this effort. While some Americans may have viewed this strategy as altruistic, it is unquestionably clear that many in the Muslim world viewed it as nothing short of an attack on Islam.

⁹⁴ Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, 509, 512, 532.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 571.

⁹⁶ The 9/11 Commission Report, 339.

⁹⁷ “Muslims Believe U.S. Seeks to Undermine Islam,” *World Public Opinion.Org*, April 24, 2007, <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brmiddleeastnafrica/346.php?nid=&id=&pnt=346>.

⁹⁸ “Negative Attitudes toward the United States in the Muslim World: Do They Matter?” *World Public Opinion.Org*, May 17, 2007, <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brmiddleeastnafrica/361.php?nid=&id=&pnt=361>.

Similarly, in Afghanistan, instead of leaving after the goal of disrupting Al Qaeda operations in the safe haven that was provided by the now routed Taliban, the U.S. military was asked to stay and rebuild there, as well. These occupations constituted an overreaction on the part of the U.S. government. Unfortunately, this completely validated the message of Al Qaeda, a group that under normal circumstances does not enjoy the support of the many Muslims people due to their draconian tactics and extreme worldview. Under conditions of occupation, however, Al Qaeda has a captive audience.

G. THE U.S. GOVERNMENT ADJUSTS

When faced with the reality of over-reaction, the U.S. government's approach to violent Islamists departs from the response to the Patriot movement. First, questioning the ideological forces behind violent Islamists has been taken off the table. Under the George Bush administration, Islam was deemed to be a "religion of peace," but there was no reluctance to use variations of the word "Islamic" when describing enemy groups. Today, the Obama administration has taken a different approach and remove all language associated with the Islamic religion from the American defense lexicon. Both approaches are incorrect. While finding evidence of a causal relationship between ideology and political violence may be difficult, it is clear that ideology plays a role in social movements.⁹⁹ While American policy makers want to focus on rational materialistic models for understanding how to relate to the Middle East, it seems clear that addressing the "values and beliefs" of the people we wish to influence would be much more productive.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, making broad and uninformed statements about the nature of Islam or ignoring the subject of religion altogether, are both inappropriate ways of dealing with the ideological foundations of society in the Middle East.

⁹⁹ Glenn E. Robinson, " Hamas as Social Movement," in *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quinton Wicktorowicz (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 116.

¹⁰⁰ Mousseau, "Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror," 5.

Second, as we have learned from the study of Patriot groups, a failure to understand what motivates violence leads to the incorrect application of force. In the fight against violent Islamists, the U.S. has pursued a dubious “counterinsurgency” strategy, which relies heavily on building democratic institutions and fostering economic development. In order to accomplish the “clear, hold, and build” techniques of this strategy, however, large conventional forces are required to secure the political space. We have already seen how these conventional forces occupying Muslim lands, pursuing goals predicated on faulty assumptions, only serves to feed the narrative of violent Islamists.

The origin and nature of violent Islamist groups is significantly similar to the Patriot movement. The handling of violent Islamists by the U.S. government, however, has been markedly different to the approach taken toward the Patriots. In order to be successful against groups like Al Qaeda, the U.S. government needs to learn from the general principles it discovered while dealing with the Patriot movement. Namely, choosing a means of applying force that accounts for the real motivating force for religious rebels: ideological orientation.

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V. IDEOLOGY

The change in U.S. strategy against the Patriot movement reflected the understanding that what motivated members of the movement was not material gain, but ideology. Once the FBI accounted for this factor, their operations against Patriots were immediately successful and the movement began to wither. To be sure, a contributing factor to the demise of the Patriot movement was also the change in public perception as a result of the Oklahoma City bombing, however, employing the previously-used heavy-handed tactics (such as those employed at Ruby Ridge and Waco) at the Freeman compound immediately following the Murrah buildings destruction, would have gone a long way to legitimizing McVeigh's attack.

How did recognizing and accounting for ideology assist the U.S. government in its struggle against the Patriots? Essentially, the federal government identified the direct link between stated ideology and observed behavior. Previously, the U.S. government expected the Patriots to behave in ways commensurate with criminals whose behavior generally reflected a material cost-benefit analysis. When faced with over-whelming force, the costs of resistance became too high, and the criminals submitted to authority. With the Patriots, however, the U.S. government realized that the standard material cost-benefit calculus was absent. In its place was an ideology that established, in many cases, death as more preferential than arrest. This recognition necessitated an entirely new approach to handling groups associated with the Patriot movement. If we can assume that Patriots and violent Islamists are sufficiently similar, the implications are clear: the U.S. government's current strategy to deal with violent Islamists is inadequate. Instead, taking lessons from past campaigns against religious rebels, the U.S. must understand the ideology of the violent Islamists and determine appropriate ways in which to apply force in order to be successful against this movement.

What is there to understand about ideology? First, ideology is crucial in determining behavior of actors. Second, once ideology is selected it serves to limit the behavioral outcomes of those actors. Third, introducing facts and logical explanations to counter ideology is not only likely to fail, but may also serve to reinforce the actors' chosen ideology. Lastly, the correct application of force is often the only action that can affect their ideological stance. This chapter examines this process.

Is it true that exploring ideology is crucial to understanding behavior? Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane assert that it is. In examining the influence that ideas have on foreign policy, Goldstein and Keohane conclude that understanding "ideas" is critical to understanding the behavior of actors.¹⁰¹ They freely admit that material concerns are important as well, but ignoring ideology will fail to explain behavior adequately. John David Lewis stresses the importance of ideology in not only the actions of terrorists, but also the forces fighting them. Lewis states, "Differences in technology, politics, or economics will always remain secondary to the ideas that motivate aggressors to launch bloody attacks and that empower—or restrain—defenders opposing those attacks."¹⁰² Ultimately, ideology matters because it *does* directly affect the behavior of those engaged in and supporting political violence. As the previous authors note in their work, other factors are present, but ideology is paramount.

Why is ideology such a strong motivator of behavior? In addressing this issue, Heather S. Gregg provides a useful definition for ideology. Ideology provides, "a set of beliefs for how the world ought to be, a critique of how the world currently is, and a course of action for realizing that world [i.e., the world

¹⁰¹ Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, "Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework," in *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, ed. Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 3.

¹⁰² John David Lewis, "'No Substitute for Victory': The Defeat of Islamic Totalitarianism," *The Objective Standard* 1, no. 4 (Winter 2006–2007), <http://www.theobjectivestandard.com/issues/2006-winter/no-substitute-for-victory.asp>.

that ought to be].”¹⁰³ Lane Crothers further highlights the ability of ideology to make sense of an extremely complex world, simplify reality and give prescriptions for how “individuals ought to behave.”¹⁰⁴ When Americans in the Midwest faced the onslaught of the farm crisis the Patriot ideology adequately explained what was happening and what needed to happen in order for the chaos to go away. Additionally, the ideology of the Patriots legitimized the use of force to bring about this change. When the U.S. government over reacted to the Patriot movement, it not only validated the ideology of the movement, but it also served to further justify the use of violence for the cause. Ideology so strongly impacts behavior because contained in it are prescriptions for how and why action must be taken.

How do ideologies do this? Goldstein and Keohane compare ideologies to “road maps.”¹⁰⁵ Road maps serve to “limit choice because [they] logically exclude other interpretations of reality, or at least suggests that such interpretations are not worthy of sustained exploration.” Humans have a finite ability to collect and process information, and ideology streamlines this process and makes the complex world simple. The “road map” analogy is extremely useful for several reasons. First, just like a road map, ideology places the actor in the world. Just as the traveler verifies his location on the road map and is then able understand his place in the transportation network; ideology places the actor in his right location in the political and/or social environment. Second, the road map simplifies a seemingly complex network of roadways. Ideology untangles the complexities of life and presents a simple outlook in its place. Third, this analogy illustrates the power of ideologies in laying out a plan (or plans) of action. Without the map the motorists has a seemingly infinite number of routes to take to get to a destination. Similarly, without ideology, the actor is lost to

¹⁰³ Heather S. Gregg, “Fighting the Jihad of the Pen: Countering Revolutionary Islam’s Ideology,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22 (2010): 293.

¹⁰⁴ Crothers, *Rage on the Right: The American Militia Movement from Ruby Ridge to Homeland Security*, 17.

¹⁰⁵ Goldstein and Keohane, “Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework,” 12.

understand in which direction to go. Fourth, just like an actual road map, there are a limited number of paths to take. In fact, it is often clear when looking at the road map that there is only *one* path to take. Similarly, ideology presents the actor with a clear choice. Lastly, the motorist convinced that his road map is correct and that he had identified the “right” route to take to reach his destination, is not easily dissuaded from changing course. Similarly, ideology presents a clear plan of action and once selected, the actor is not well inclined to select another route, unless the current one is absolutely untenable. It seems very clear then that once an ideology is selected, there is no “going back” unless the “route” the actor selected is somehow blocked.

The Patriot road map helped rural Americans understand their place in the world and simplified an extremely complex and volatile situation. It not only provided a direction for the Patriot movement, but a specific route: that of violent rebellion. Once on that route, the Patriots did not display any indication that they would be easily “re-routed.” This illustrates the peculiar affect that ideology has on people; namely, that once an ideology is selected, there seems to be fewer options for changing it. This phenomenon is precisely why appealing to ideologues with material incentives to change behavior or trying to engage in dialogue hoping to change minds is so often ineffective.

Why is this the case? Research indicates that instead of facts dictating belief, our beliefs have a strong impact on what facts we choose to accept.¹⁰⁶ The implications of this are clear: whatever ideology an actor subscribes to is likely to only be reinforced as new information is received, regardless of whether or not the input supports or disproves the viewpoint. This dynamic seems especially prevalent among political partisans, confirming that actors who hold strong beliefs will likely try and fit all new information that they gather about their environment into their worldview. In fact, *even when the facts directly counter the*

¹⁰⁶ Joe Keohane, “How Facts Backfire,” *Boston Globe* (July 11, 2010), http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2010/07/11/how_facts_backfire/.

*beliefs of the actor, they are likely to make the actors beliefs even stronger.*¹⁰⁷

This explains why appealing to a rational process, through economic development or democratization, will not work. From the perspective of the U.S., these are wonderful incentives to marginalizing violent behavior. In reality however, these efforts only reinforce whatever ideology the target audience already holds. This evidence has profound implications for dealing with religious rebels. If any new inputs are likely only to reinforce their deeply held beliefs, any attempt at rationalizing or negotiating will likely fail, as these efforts will only be viewed through the lens of their particular worldview.

If this is true, are there any solutions to dealing with religious rebels so intensely driven by ideology? It turns out that there may be one solution. Researchers have discovered that only when actors are presented with blunt, unmistakable evidence that directly counters the central premise of their ideology, are they inclined to change their beliefs. James Kuklinski and Paul Quirk, in a study on attitude and beliefs about welfare policy, conclude that actors consider information that adjusts their beliefs only when “it is presented in a way that virtually compel[s] attention and reflection.”¹⁰⁸ How does this translate to political violence? David Tucker highlights the research of many scholars when he concludes, “in the strategic struggle between those that use terrorism and those who oppose them, the side that wins is generally the side that best controls and limits its use of force.”¹⁰⁹ This was certainly the case with the Patriot movement. The U.S. government’s over-reaction at Waco and Ruby Ridge only served to reinforce the Patriots beliefs. When the U.S. government acted in a way that was completely opposite of what the Patriots expected (and, given the length of the standoff, had a lot of time to think about it) their adherence to their

¹⁰⁷ Keohane, “How Facts Backfire.”

¹⁰⁸ James H. Kuklinski and Paul J. Quirk, “Reconsidering the Rational Public: Cognition, Heuristics, and Mass Opinion,” *Institute of Government and Public Affairs, University of Illinois* (December 31, 1998), <http://igpa.uillinois.edu/library/reconsidering-rational-public-cognition-heuristics-and-mass-opinion>, 31.

¹⁰⁹ David Tucker, “Terrorism, Networks, and Strategy: Why Conventional Wisdom is Wrong,” *Homeland Security Affairs* 4, no. 2 (June 2008), <http://www.hsaj.org/>, 12.

ideology began to crack. In this case, it was the careful adjustment to the way force was used that proved decisive precisely because it forced the Patriots to reevaluate their worldview.

How does the use of force defeat religious rebels? To understand this it is useful to look at the concept of the “mobilizing trinity.” This psychological concept proposes that actors “fight or resist so long as three essential beliefs are held.”¹¹⁰ The trinity consists of a belief in something that is “good,” which is to be promoted or defended, a belief in something that is “evil” and must be destroyed or resisted, and a belief that the “good cause” will ultimately prevail. Ideology constructs this trilogy, and the correct application of force is crucial for dismantling it.

For the Patriots, the cause of the rural American farmer struggling to keep his land was good, and the government working to take the land was evil. The various legal schemes and the willingness to use force provided the third leg of the trilogy, the possibility that they could prevail against the government. The U.S. government facilitated the Patriot mobilizing trinity by misapplying the use of force, thereby further casting themselves as the evil entity. Additionally, when Patriot legal and tactical actions were successful and viewed as legitimate by many members of the population, it gave the Patriots the sense that they may, in fact, be able to win the war with the federal government.

When the U.S. government altered their strategy, however, that changed. The government’s refusal to storm barricaded Patriots removed the image of the government as the evil Goliath and the Patriots as the defenseless David. Rather, the government’s handling of the standoffs with the Freeman and the Republic of Texas served to erode all three elements of the mobilization trinity. First, by not over reacting with force, the government sharply increased its legitimacy, not only with the general population, but also with the population more

¹¹⁰ Maurice Tugwell, “Terrorism as a Psychological Strategy,” in *Psychological Operations and Political Warfare in Long-Term Strategic Planning*, ed. Jano Radvanyi (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1990), 70.

inclined to support the Patriots and even with the Patriots themselves. Second, by not accommodating the Patriot desire for a violent stand off, the government created time and space for fissures within the Patriot movement to develop. Instead of the Patriots holding an “us verses them” mentality against the government, they began to view each other with suspicion as the crucible of an armed stand off wore down the participants. Finally, the government strictly controlled all aspects of the stand offs, slowly wearing down the Patriots belief that a successful outcome was possible.

The same concept can be applied to violent Islamists today. Currently, the actions of the U.S. only serve to reinforce the Islamist mobilizing trinity. The U.S. pursuit of a “counterinsurgency” strategy in the Middle East has resulted in the employment of large numbers of conventional forces. The presence of these forces only serves to validate the narrative of the Islamists and reinforce the “goodness” of their cause. The way in which the U.S. conducts the counterinsurgency through imposing democratic institutions and economic development, verifies the “evil” intentions of the U.S. to destroy Islamic culture. That the U.S. has been wildly ineffective in this endeavor strengthens the belief of many in the Muslim world that the cause of the violent Islamists is bound to be victorious.

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VI. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Given what has been learned about the importance of ideology, what would an effective strategy against violent Islamists look like? Both Gregg and Lewis, who evaluated in depth the importance of ideology in motivating violent Islamists, offer two different solutions.

Lewis insists the first step is to attack and destroy the Islamic totalitarian state of Iran. He argues that Iran represents the “political, economic, and ideological center of [political Islam],” and is therefore the logical starting point for a war against violent Islamism.¹¹¹ Lewis’ point is predicated on the assumption that breaking the state of Iran will “demonstrate the spectacular failure and incompetence of the Islamic fundamentalist movement as a whole,” and that other nations will alter their behavior as a result. The desired goal? Sending a message to the world that “political Islam is finished.”

This idea is interesting because it seeks to dismantle the mobilizing trinity by destroying the belief that the cause can be successful. Unfortunately, this approach has significant weaknesses. First, Lewis’s plan assumes that it would only take the destruction of Iran to render the idea of political Islam obsolete in the Muslim world; perhaps; but it is just as likely that the U.S. would have to move on to destroy the governments of other Middle Eastern countries as well. Second, Lewis’s plan does not address the other two aspects of the mobilizing trinity; that of belief in the Islamist cause as good and the belief that the U.S. is evil. If anything, Lewis’s approach will only serve to strengthen those two legs of the trilogy. Given then that success of the approach would be predicated on achieving the desired effects of making political Islam unpopular in the Muslim world, this plan leaves a lot to be desired. Finally, Lewis himself addresses the primary obstacle to carrying out this plan: the complete lack of political will in the U.S. for such an undertaking.

¹¹¹ Lewis, “‘No Substitute for Victory’: The Defeat of Islamic Totalitarianism.”

Gregg takes a different approach. She calls for fostering a “market place of ideas” where Islamism’s claims can be exposed to rational scrutiny and challenged. Gregg insists that, “the persistence of revolutionary Islam suggests that these ideas need to be countered in order to strike at the root of the problem driving Islamically motivated terrorism and insurgency.”¹¹² Gregg further indicates that, “challenging the vision for a better world promised by revolutionary Islam is the best means for fighting the ideology. Ultimately, ideologies are countered through competing worldviews that offer hope and a better vision for how to live.”¹¹³ To do this, Gregg recommends such practical solutions as magnifying the infighting between revolutionary Islamic groups, leveraging U.S. universities and learning institutions to create places where Islamic ideologies can be presented and debated, and encouraging Muslim nations to cultivate debate on the role of Islam in their societies.

This approach is interesting because it seeks to dismantle two legs of the mobilization trinity; that of the belief that the violent Islamist cause is good and the U.S. is evil. By indirectly fostering debate on the nature of political Islam, Gregg’s plan seeks to erode support for violent Islamists by demonstrating that their cause is anything but good and that the U.S. and other Western powers are not the devils they are made to be. While certainly a viable option as part of a range of strategies, this approach may not be singularly adequate for three reasons. First, Gregg’s recommendations do not address the third leg of the mobilizing trinity. Nothing in this approach appears to counter the belief that the cause of the violent Islamist can win. While it may seek to present Islamism as undesirable, it does not present it as unobtainable. Second, this approach assumes that once Muslims begin to engage in rational debate about political Islam, they will be turned off by the message. Our earlier examination about how people process new information into their current worldview, however, indicates this may not be completely effective. Finally, Gregg herself indicates how the

¹¹² Gregg, “Fighting the Jihad of the Pen: Countering Revolutionary Islam’s Ideology,” 293.

¹¹³ Ibid., 307.

U.S. government can only play an indirect and minor role in executing this strategy. Gregg explains that any direct attempt by the U.S. to craft a counterargument to Islamism will only be seen as propaganda only and only serve to reinforce the widely held belief that American is out to destroy Islamic culture.

What would be ideal is an approach that adequately addresses all three legs of the mobilizing trinity. Such an example exists in the “Sovereignty Solution,” proposed by Anna Simons and her students at the Naval Postgraduate School.¹¹⁴ This calls for the strengthening of the concept of sovereignty by holding political leaders accountable for the actions of their peoples. Under this plan, if political violence were directed against the U.S., the U.S. would approach the leadership who “owns” the offending parties and demand resolution. The U.S. would then unilaterally take action based on the response of the offending government. If the government complies, the U.S. could assist wherever and however the foreign government saw fit. If the foreign government did not comply, the U.S. would destroy that government (and not rebuild it), reinforcing the concept of sovereignty by forcing leaders to remain accountable for the actions of their people and the people operating within their particular political boundaries.

This concept is interesting, as it completely rejects the notion that economic development and democratization can achieve peaceful results. It abandons the current efforts the U.S. makes in distributing global economic aid as it recognizes the negative impact that economic development has, not only on reducing terrorism, but also in retarding natural economic activity in the designated region. Additionally, this approach discards the current policy of insisting that other nations comply with our particular ideological standards

¹¹⁴ Anna Simons, Don Redd, Joe McGraw and Duane Lauchengco, “The Sovereignty Solution,” *The American Interest* (March–April 2007), <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=251>.

(democracy). It recognizes the right of other nations and peoples to do with their polities as they like, yet demands that they do not tolerate those that are responsible for attacking others in the global community.

This idea is worth consideration because it attacks all three legs of the mobilizing trinity. First, by refusing to interject their ideological values on other nations, the U.S. would reduce the belief that the U.S. is evil for imposing their values on Middle Eastern peoples by destroying Islam. Additionally, U.S. financial and political support for regimes of questionable character that are pervasive in the Middle East would cease, further removing the stigma the U.S. has of supporting oppressive regimes to suit its purposes. Second, by abandoning the counterinsurgency approach to solving terrorism, the U.S. would no longer engage in the occupation of Muslim lands, which serves as the single biggest issue garnering violent Islamists' support in the Middle East. This would go a long way to reducing the belief that violent Islamists are "good," as it would remove the "us versus them" mentality that resonates today. Lastly, this approach would eliminate the belief that the struggle of the violent Islamists to destroy America would ever be successful. Given the U.S.'s ability to project military force globally, there are few places where uncooperative governments could hide. Essentially, once it is established that support for Al Qaeda is equivalent to a death sentence, the operational freedom that this group enjoys today would be significantly, and perhaps catastrophically, reduced. Thus, this approach addresses all three aspects of the mobilizing trinity and serves as a viable option for dealing with religious rebels.

A cautionary note about an approach, such as this, is appropriate here. Two key aspects of this argument call for unilateral military action against foreign governments only as a last resort and never as a preemptive measure. This would require the U.S. to assume a certain amount of risk and be very disciplined in applying this strategy, which may not always be easy. For example, what occurs when credible information of impending attacks is gained? In this scenario, the U.S. may be tempted to strike offending governments before it is

attacked. Similarly, what if there existed *less than credible* information of an impending attack, but domestic political realities did not allow for even a chance of a terrorist attack. Would the U.S. use its sovereignty argument to strike in this instance as well? These scenarios create a situation where the optimal strategy appears to be attacking foreign governments first and not waiting until after the attack to levy the demand to turn over the offenders or face the consequences. It is important to remember that options for disrupting impending attacks outside of preemptive strikes on foreign governments exist. Further, using the sovereignty solution in a way described above would not appropriately address the mobilizing trinity.

Ultimately, the “sovereignty solution” illustrates how force might be used to disrupt the mobilizing trinity and is simply one approach that can be considered. Certainly this approach does not represent the perfect solution for every case, but it is important to understand that any approach should address how political violence is actually motivated. By understanding how ideology creates “road maps” and constructs the mobilizing trinity, strategies can be employed to establish roadblocks, destroy roads, and/or break apart trilogies.

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VII. CONCLUSION

Current U.S. strategy, as it applies to violent Islamists, is based on flawed assumptions about what motivates people to engage in and support political violence. Of the two primary theories that account for political violence offered in the contemporary literature, rational-materialism and the cultural determinism, the U.S. has based its approach on the former. It has been shown, however, that rational-materialism does not adequately explain terrorism or any other form of political violence. Any policy predicated on this assumption, therefore is destined to fail. Cultural determinism, however, also fails to usefully inform a coherent policy on dealing with Islamic terrorism. Instead of relying on a universal theory explaining political violence, the U.S. should seek to first understand the role that ideology plays in motivating political violence within the context that it exists. Once policymakers understand the ideology that spawns political violence, they are in a much better position to craft strategy that will sufficiently destroy the mobilizing structures of these religious rebels.

Critics should not assume that an examination of political Islam is an inherently discriminatory exercise; or one in which judgments will necessarily be passed on to an entire religious group. During the Patriot crisis, analysts were certainly able to distinguish between the beliefs of Episcopalians and the violent ideology of Christian Identity. Similarly, there is no reason why a thoughtful evaluation of political Islam cannot distinguish between violent actors determined to impose their ideology on their neighbors and the world and peaceful followers of the Islamic faith. The U.S. should also, however, not assume that the message of the violent Islamist is inherently unattractive to the greater Muslim world. Again, looking back at the Patriot movement for guidance, Crothers and Dyer rightly point out that the ideology of the Patriot movement was grounded in a fair amount of widely accepted facts.¹¹⁵ While the Patriots did not fully and correctly

¹¹⁵ *Rage on the Right: The American Militia Movement from Ruby Ridge to Homeland Security*, 12; Dyer, *Harvest of Rage: Why Oklahoma City is Only the Beginning*, 110.

understand the elements of Christianity, the American political culture, and the economic foundations of the farm crisis, they certainly had a grasp of enough ingredients to make their message culturally relevant and plausible to a large cross section of America. Further, their message was convincing enough that it was able to justify the use and support of violent action in pursuit of ideological goals. The same can be said for violent Islamists today. If there were not generally accepted aspects of Islam embedded in the ideology of violent Islamists, they would never be able to achieve the level of legitimacy they do in the Muslim world. The purpose of the thesis is not to determine to what extent the ideology of the Patriot movement overlaps with Christianity and the American cultural-political past. Similarly, this thesis does not attempt to determine just how accurately violent Islamists reflect the religion of Islam. Rather, what is important is to point out that there is, in fact, at least some degree of overlap regarding the Muslim faith and the message of the violent Islamists. How much overlap exists has been, is now, and will continue to be a topic of passionate debate. The answer this thesis gives to the question of how much overlap exists between the message of violent Islamist and mainstream Islam is simply: enough. Therefore, strategies designed to combat violent Islamists reconcile with this fact to understand fully how the message of the violent Islamists resonates in the Muslim world to encourage people to engage in or support the violent jihad.

This approach attempts to separate adherence to an ideology from members of a cultural group. Consider WWII. Not all Germans subscribed to the Nazi version of National Socialism. For example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (and the Confessing Church) categorically rejected the ideology of Nazism and held fast to their adherence of Christianity, eventually at the cost of his life. A distinction between Germans, like Bonhoeffer and those like him, and Nazis is possible and should be pursued. However, should a mass movement like that of the Nazis be repeated, the U.S. should confront such an enemy with the same vigor as that presented to the Nazis.

It remains for the Muslim peoples to determine the nature of their religion, and it is unwise for those in the West to ascribe ignorantly attributes to the Islamic faith. Rather, Western observers should be diligent in assessing the facts as they present themselves and developing policy in accordance with those facts, not in accordance with cultural assumptions or wishful thinking. Unfortunately, up to this point, U.S. leaders have opted to make broad statements regarding the nature of Islam irrespective of facts, erroneously hoping to show that they either truly understand Islam, or that they hope determine what Islam really is.

A recent statement by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) exemplifies this long and troubling trend. Admiral Mullen indicated that a key strategy for battling violent Islamists is teaching people to read as education is empowering, and it would enable Muslims to “understand the Quran for what it is and not merely what [their] mullah tells [them] it is, who is equally uneducated.”¹¹⁶ Similarly, Admiral Mullen indicated that through education a Muslim could “raise his children to a higher standard of living than the one he knew, an aspiration shared by parents around the world.” In this statement, we see the fallacies that continue to plague the U.S. approach to combating terrorism. Admiral Mullen’s statements assume that whatever the Koran says, it will be universally interpreted as peaceful. His statements assume that, if only people had the means to pursue material gain, they would be peaceful. His statements assume that ideology can be combated by a presentation of “the facts.” All of these assumptions are completely false.

It is significant that these statements are coming from the senior military officer in the U.S. military. His words set policy. As such, his words should put to rest any remaining doubt that the U.S.’s strategy toward combating violent Islamists remains seriously flawed and rests on assumptions that are dubious at best.

¹¹⁶ Jim Garamone, “Mullen Urges New Methods of Deterrence,” *U.S. Department of Defense*, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=61684>.

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